Embracing our community

Cedars-Sinai anti-obesity effort goes year-round

Turning better health into a habit

Milk or soda? Carrots or chips? Exercise or TV?

Let’s face it: Unhealthy choices can be tempting, no matter what our age. But a growing number of parents and children in disadvantaged Los Angeles neighborhoods now make healthier choices when it comes to questions like the above — thanks to Cedars-Sinai’s Healthy Habits program aimed at combating childhood obesity. Healthy Habits is helping children and families learn about healthy eating and physical activity with programs reaching elementary and middle school students, parents of preschool children, and families in underserved communities.

In the 2011–12 school year, these programs reached more than 2,500 people through more than 17,000 educational encounters.

In partnership with LA’s Best, Koreatown Youth and Community Center and other community organizations, Cedars-Sinai recently expanded these programs to include summer sessions. Parents and kids alike proved that it’s never too late — or too early — to cultivate healthy habits.

“OK, let’s dance. Breathe!”

One morning in August, Bianca Bracho-Perez, a Cedars-Sinai community health educator, leads a small group of women in a one-hour Zumba® routine that includes moves ranging from sit-ups to salsa. Latin

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COACH brightens the holidays

The employees of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center brought joy to hundreds of Los Angeles families over the holidays. Through COACH for Kids and Their Families’ Adopt-A-Family program and holiday toy drive, Cedars-Sinai employees bought items like mattresses, shoes, towels, coats, even a bed, to needy families across Los Angeles. And of course, there were toys, lots and lots of toys. continued on page 2

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Spearheaded for the past 14 years by the COACH for Kids and Their Families™ program, part of the Maxine Dunitz Children’s Health Center, departments were given names of needy families and their Christmas wish lists. Elissa Rosenberg, senior outreach coordinator for Cedars-Sinai Spine Center, says on her department’s adopted family wish list were pots and pans, plates, silverware and shoes. Rosenberg picked up a pair of size 10 shoes for one of the boys and added a gift card. She says when she helped deliver the gifts with the COACH team, she was surprised to see a nearly bare house, no decorations, no Christmas tree and almost no furniture. When the smallest child, a little girl, saw the gifts, she jumped up and down with glee. Her mom was crying. Rosenberg says when the Cedars-Sinai employees left the house, they too were crying.

Another family adopted by the Spine Center and Orthopedics Clinic needed a bed. The family was a grandmother raising her grandkids, and grandma was sleeping on the floor. Employees pooled their money and bought a pull-out sofa for the family. On another family’s Christmas wish list was a new wheelchair for their homebound grandmother. The wheelchair she had was barely usable, and Lynne Emma, RN, MPH, a Cedars-Sinai administrator, volunteered to buy her a new one.

Emma said, “I was just so happy I could do something for this family, and I knew a new wheelchair would make a big difference in their lives.”

Through COACH for Kids, Cedars-Sinai employees from two departments spread joy and smiles over the holidays at several homeless shelters, bringing toys to the children and needed supplies to parents. The COACH for Kids mobile medical units also were on the move, conducting holiday toy giveaway events as well as health fairs from Thanksgiving through the New Year.

Before Christmas, COACH for Kids partnered with the Los Angeles City Housing Authority and several agencies and held Holiday Health Fairs at housing developments in Los Angeles.

COACH program director Michele Rigsby Pauley, RN, MSN, CPNP, says the many needy families helped by COACH are not forgotten when the holidays are over. She says her team is grateful that for more than a decade they have had the opportunity to collaborate with so many Cedars-Sinai employees whose kindness and generosity are changing lives.

Thousands of senior citizens in Los Angeles each year take part in programs created for them by Cedars-Sinai’s Department of Community Health and Education. From sponsoring flu shot clinics and health screenings to offering workshops in diet, nutrition and exercise, the department helps older residents of Los Angeles have a higher quality of life. The department recently launched a diabetes education effort, with blood glucose screenings, educational lectures and follow-up counseling.

Other senior citizen outreach programs being offered by Cedars-Sinai include blood pressure clinics, workshops about the signs of and how to test for colon cancer, hydration information, healthy eating, maintaining heart health, stroke prevention and skin cancer awareness. Workshops are conducted by doctors and nurses from Cedars-Sinai, and screenings are conducted by the medical center’s clinical staff.

“We go wherever we are needed, to senior citizen centers and churches and synagogues,” said Logan Williams, the department’s associate director. “The programs are comprehensive – every time I go, I learn something.”
Teaching better habits
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music pulsating from a boom box sets the pace at the Benny H. Potter West Adams Avenues Memorial in South Los Angeles.

After the women sit on the ground to stretch, a toddler plops down next to his mom and leans over to touch his toes. Helping parents set a good example for their kids is just one of the positive effects of this Healthy Habits Exercise in the Park program. Participants have lost weight, toned muscles and made friends.

Jackie Cole, for example, is highly motivated after losing 10 pounds over the summer. She now does Zumba workouts at home with her 6-year-old daughter. “I get anxious sometimes, but the workouts help Zen me out,” she says.

That afternoon at Charles H. Kim Elementary School in Koreatown, the 15 second-graders in Sunny Hu’s classroom sing to the tune of “The Itsy Bitsy Spider,” with the lyrics changed to provide a lesson about how milk, yogurt and cheese “can make you tall and grow.” Hu, a Cedars-Sinai Healthy Habits educator, has the group’s attention for an hour of activities to stretch their minds and bodies.

Hu calls out the name of a food, and the class must remember a different movement for each food group. The whole class giggles every time the dairy group comes up and they get to sway their hips and do the “milk mambo.” The session ends with the students mixing yogurt, blueberries and whole-wheat nuggets cereal to make a yogurt parfait. They appear to enjoy this nutritious snack as much as if it were a dish of ice cream.

Mission accomplished.

New grant allows Healthy Habits to expand

A grant from the Leon Lowenstein Foundation Inc. will allow Cedars-Sinai’s Healthy Habits program to reach children at four additional schools.

Healthy Habits already serves 12 elementary schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, fighting childhood obesity by teaching about nutrition and physical activity.

With the new funding, the program will reach a total of about 144 classes and 120 teachers. This translates to 3,800 elementary students.

“At Benny H. Potter West Adams Avenues Memorial Park in South Los Angeles: Helping parents set a good example for their kids is one benefit of the Healthy Habits Exercise in the Park program.

At Charles H. Kim Elementary School in Koreatown, Healthy Habits educator Sunny Hu leads a group of second-graders in an hour of activities to stretch their minds and bodies.

BY THE NUMBERS

A recent evaluation of second-grade teachers found:

- 93 percent indicated the program influenced them to make healthier choices
- 90 percent observed students talking about what they learned in Healthy Habits
- 83 percent observed students eating healthier snacks
Launching careers for nearly 20 years

It’s helped launch the careers of more than 100 Cedars-Sinai employees and medical staff members.

For nearly two decades, Cedars-Sinai’s Youth Employment and Development (YED) program has introduced thousands of disadvantaged high school juniors and seniors to healthcare while providing them with basic job training, such as telephone and office etiquette, interviewing tips, résumé writing and computer skills.

“Our goal is to provide students with real-world experiences,” said Andrea Perry, who directs YED, a two-year program for eligible juniors and seniors from Fairfax High School. “One of the things we try to teach students is that Cedars-Sinai, even though it provides healthcare, is a business and we have to function as a business. We need people to support the business side as well as provide medical care.”

The program began in 1993, just after the Los Angeles riots. It was an effort by Cedars-Sinai to help the community heal as well as to expose high school juniors and seniors to healthcare, Perry said.

Iryna Yudin, RN, an intensive care unit nurse at Cedars-Sinai, participated in the program in 2001 after moving to Southern California from Ukraine. Yudin spoke little English. She found it easier to learn a new language by working in YED, and the program helped her discover what she wanted to do with her life.

“I was in the 11th grade when I moved here, and I was supposed to graduate. Since my English was so poor, I was put back into the ninth grade,” Yudin said. “It was frustrating, but then I heard about YED. For many, this program is about being in the right place at the right time.”

Students show off their work at the annual YED Showcase at Cedars-Sinai.

That was me.”

Yudin attended Mount St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles, earned a degree in nursing and made her way back to Cedars-Sinai.

Perry said each year, about 50 juniors and seniors are recruited for YED.

“They perform some clerical work, but there’s also an opportunity for job shadowing,” Perry said. “That’s where the magic is. And, if they get in there and take advantage of those types of opportunities, they will succeed.”

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